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Forest Service

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Individual and Organizational Accountability in the Forest Service

Successful Management of Work Agreements

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Successful Management of Work Agreements

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Individual and Organizational Accountability in the Forest Service

Successful Management of Work Agreements

Executive Summary

Accountability in the Forest Service needed a strategic review.

Accountability is critical to the Forest Service's success. Yet given the complexity of today's operating environment and the significant demands placed on the Forest Service to perform, accomplishment of Forest Service commitments has become more and more difficult.

Some people have recently expressed concerns that the Forest Service has not delivered what was expected. Examples include spending wilderness funds on nonwilderness projects and not accomplishing as much timber production and fish habitat improvement as expected. These are new experiences for an agency that has had a "can do" attitude and ability for decades. Perhaps more importantly, there are widely differing views about what causes these occasional short falls in accomplishment and what to do about them. Accordingly, a strategic analysis of accountability was chartered by Chief and Staff.

Defining Accountability

Accountability applies to the individual, the unit and the whole Forest Service; some items for which we are accountable are negotiable and others are mandatory.

Accountability, that is, being answerable for what we do, is a broad concept that is applicable in many situations at many levels. Four questions help characterize the scope of accountability: **Who is accountable?** The agency as a whole, a particular work unit, and an individual employee are all accountable. **Accountable to whom?** We are accountable to external sources such as Congress and OMB, and also to internal sources such as the Chief, a line officer, our peers, supervisor and ourselves. **Are the accountable items negotiable or mandatory?** Some items for which we are accountable are negotiable and some are not. A work schedule between an employee and their supervisor may be negotiable. An output level or standard specified in legislation is mandatory. **Are they primarily process oriented or results oriented?** Again, we are accountable for both. We are accountable for processes, such as personnel and financial regulations, as well as results, such as tangible services and hard targets.

Accountability is being answerable for what we do.

Realization of this breadth of accountability helped in developing an appropriate definition for accountability in the Forest Service context.

Accountability is being answerable for what we do.

In order to be accountable:

We must do what we agreed or were directed to do; as we agreed or are required to do it; monitor and show our results; and take action to improve results.

Contributions From Two Schools of Thought

Contributions from both the back-to-basics and the empower-the-workforce perspectives are essential...

Numerous perspectives were offered on how best to achieve the accountability goal. Two prominent approaches to accountability—back-to-basics and empower-the-workforce—were strongly advocated and were found to be very useful. Specifically, the back-to-basics approach made clear the three ingredients of accountability; **clarify work agreements**, **check progress** in the accomplishment of work agreements, and then **make adjustments** based on how well the agreement was accomplished.

The empower-the-workforce approach contributed three valuable organizational strategies that would create an organizational culture where **leadership is shared**, there is **attention to human resources** and the work environment, and there is a **focus on the customer**.

and they must be integrated.

Both of these schools of thought had value, but neither in itself would bring about the desired change. The strengths of both must be integrated to form a new approach to accountability appropriate for a modern organization such as the Forest Service. This approach is not merely the addition of the three ingredients of the back-to-basics approach to the three strategies of the empower-the-workforce approach. Rather, a full integration is necessary. Checking progress in an environment of shared leadership, for example, is different from doing so in a command and control environment. That integration produces a completely new approach to accountability, one that, when fully in place, will be manifested in the behavior of Forest Service employees. We call that approach the Successful Management of Work Agreements.

PROPOSAL: Successful Management of Work Agreemments

Accountability Goal

Though the past and the present are useful in understanding what has happened and what is happening, the future is the appropriate point of focus for this project. Our objective is not to judge or fix the problems

of yesterday. Rather, we seek to prepare for the challenges of the future. Toward that end, and building from the Forest Service's "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles," our goal is to:

Achieve a leadership and organizational culture in which responsibility and accountability for excellence are shared by all employees and in the execution of the Forest Service's "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles."

Our goal for accountability includes a strong focus on leadership and organizational culture.

The contributions from the two schools of thought concerning accountability and this accountability goal are consistent with the Forest Service's "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles." In fact, a portion of the Vision states that "We are an efficient and productive organization that excels in achieving its mission. Responsibility and accountability for excellence are shared by employees and partners. The American people can count on the Forest Service to perform." In other examples the Guiding Principles state that "we maintain high professional and ethical standards, we are responsible and accountable for what we do," and "we follow laws, regulations, executive direction, and congressional intent."

Proposal Component #1: Future Behavior

For us to achieve the accountability goal and integrate these two schools of thought, the Forest Service of the future will need to be characterized by particular behaviors, at both the individual and corporate levels. This future behavior will represent a change in many respects, although it is also true that some of this desirable behavior is being practiced today in some situations. The following behaviors, which represent the first component of this proposal, will help us achieve a progressive organizational culture that will facilitate a productive focus on accountability.

Shared leadership for accountability

- Expectations are jointly established, problem solving and decision making are participatory, and accountability for results is shared.
- Leaders value development of integrated responses to issues and problems and elimination of excessive direction.
- Leaders provide timely feedback, foster change, and deliver positive or negative consequences when warranted.
- There is an open environment for addressing agency work in which all employees are encouraged to share their views and individual values are respected.

Attention to the human resource and work environment for accountability

- All employees are well trained and equipped to do their jobs.

- Managers foster a work environment in which all employees welcome constructive feedback on performance and where prompt and appropriate recognition strengthens the accountability of individuals and units throughout the organization.
- Employees from all levels actively participate in oversight mechanisms that assess individual and unit performances and accountability.

Focus on the customer for accountability

- Employees and units take measures to know their publics and their expectations, seek their inputs and involvement, and respond to them.
- Customers are involved and included in oversight processes, as well as in determining adjustments resulting from monitoring activities.

Proposal Component #2: Seven Step Scheme

A tangible way to utilize the Successful Management of Work Agreements approach to accountability is to employ a series of steps in our work. This seven step scheme is applicable all the way from the individual through the corporate level. It can be applied formally with associated documentation and signed approval, as in annual performance standards or allocations of annual budgets. It can also be applied informally, as in thinking through work priorities among peers. It is not proposed as a solution to any particular accountability situation. Rather it is offered as a tangible approach to focus attention and activities that will *lead* to a high level of accountability–being answerable for what we do.

In many respects, these steps are nothing more than good management in a progressive organizational environment. Yet, without the activities that these steps represent, achievement of the desired future behavior contributing to improved accountability is unlikely.

Establish work agreements (step #1)

All parties to a work agreement need to share understanding of the agreement, agree on appropriate measures and standards, and establish agreement in a participatory manner.

Set priorities (step #2)

Reviewing previous work agreements in light of the new work agreement and setting priorities among work agreements is essential in this era of ever-expanding work demands.

Check progress (step #3)

Work progress must be assessed periodically with the responsible employee or organizational unit taking the initiative to make self-assessments and discuss progress with whomever is holding them accountable. Progress

checks are the primary vehicles for ensuring project success and organizational learning, and not merely as times to "check up" on those responsible for implementing the agreement.

Define adjustments (step #4)

Necessary adjustments for ensuring success must be made in a participatory manner. Increased participation in this step often helps broaden the range of adjustments considered and increases the probability of success. Adjustments can range all the way from revising work agreements and providing more funding to rewarding and punishing the people or organization primarily responsible for the expected outcome.

Implement adjustments (step #5)

Follow through in making the necessary adjustments to ensure success and monitor enough to see if the intended results occur. Without actually implementing the adjustment, such as giving rewards and punishments, we really are not being answerable for what we do.

Demonstrate and communicate results (step #6)

In addition to accomplishing the work agreement, we must also demonstrate and communicate those results in ways that are meaningful to our key customers, to those who hold us accountable, and to ourselves.

Conduct performance feedback loops (step #7)

We must continue to learn from past experiences to adjust overall work agreements and ways they are developed, both by the individual and organization levels through self-assessment and by whomever is holding the implementing individual or organization accountable.

Recommended Actions to Improve Accountability

Improved accountability does not require major financial outlays, but does require significant organization behavior change.

As mentioned above, the Forest Service can improve accountability by merely embracing the proposal explained in this report. Changing behavior and using the seven step scheme in day to day work are at the heart of making progress in this important area. Such an approach does not require a major financial outlay, but instead calls for a significant commitment on the part of the organization to change.

It is an organizational behavior axiom that change only occurs when the need has been well demonstrated, and the benefits are clearly seen. The evidence on the need for increased accountability is compelling and the benefits from changing (increased efficiency, credibility and flexibility) are sought by virtually every employee. Thus we are at the point of "just doing it!"

To help the Forest Service embrace the successful Management of Work Agreements proposal, a few high leverage implementation actions are offered. They should not be interpreted as being the master plan for institutionalizing the proposal in the organization. As has been said, no master plan is needed: only the commitment to embrace the future behavior and the seven step scheme will quickly put us on the road to improved accountability. Rather, the implementation actions represent a blend of activities which will help "jumpstart" the effort and reinforce the organizational change.

Implementation Actions to Improve Accountability

- Institutionalize Corporate Accountability Expectations: Review and revise directive system to be better integrated and streamlined.

- Provide Accountability Training: Incorporate an accountability module into existing training programs such as employee orientation, supervisory training and leadership training.

- Strengthen Review Process: Overhaul the management review system. Fully utilize accountability indicators in reviews.

- Recognize Accountability Performance: Provide appropriate positive and negative reinforcement for actions affecting the level of accountability.

- Promote Organizational Successes: Evaluate alternative organizational structures and operational approaches. Reward and champion successes.

- Accelerate Culture Change: Promote shared leadership and behaviors consistent with high levels of accountability.

- Monitor and Track Accountability through Indicators or Benchmarks: Establish and use accountability indicators when assessing or reporting on performance.

Introduction

The "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles" statement is the foundation for our accountability proposal.

Accountability of all public organizations and their employees is a key concern in the United States, and a greater concern today than in the past. Federal funding is becoming ever tighter as concerns grow about the increasing Federal deficit, so the effectiveness with which available dollars are spent is closely watched. The public debates over the best management of public lands have also led to closer scrutiny by interested groups and individuals who are not as willing to accept without question the decisions of professional resource managers as the public was 10 or 20 years ago.

The "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles statement for the Forest Service" explicitly recognizes the importance of accountability for the Forest Service. For example, the new vision statement says that:

Responsibility and accountability for excellence are shared by employees and partners. The American public can count on the Forest Service to perform.

And one of the guiding principles states that:

We are responsible and accountable for what we do.

Accountability is being answerable for what we do. It applies to the entire organization, through corporate accountability, and to each employee, through individual accountability.

There is concern about examples of shortfalls in performance that are new to our "can do" organization.

People have recently argued that the Forest Service and individuals within the Forest Service are not always performing as is expected of them. One example critics often cite is the Forest Service's expenditure of appropriated wilderness management funds in fiscal year 1990 on nonwilderness recreation projects, although Congress intended the money be spent on wilderness management. Another is the failure of some regions and national forests to reach the agreed-upon levels of timber offered for sale in fiscal year 1992. Others include our slowness to downsize staffing levels for the timber sale program in fiscal year 1992 and our underachievement in the area of fish habitat improvement work. Finally, formal expressions of employees' concerns are manifest in the increasing number of whistleblower complaints.

Falling short of expectations is new to us and our "can do" attitude that has produced an enviable record of almost complete program accomplishments until very recently. There are some clear reasons for this new situation, such as the increased complexity of resource management and shortages of funds, but there is not full agreement on the causes. Though some things

have been done to improve performance, such as clarifying the congressional intent in appropriations, there is not full agreement about what should be done on a broader scale in light of these shortfalls in achievement. This report is another milestone in the development of an overall strategic approach to accountability.

Accountability Task Force

A task force was formed to perform a strategic review of accountability in the Forest Service.

In the fall of 1991, Chief & Staff chartered a task force of Forest Service employees to conduct a strategic analysis of accountability in the Forest Service. Chief & Staff saw a strong need to think strategically about the agency's ability to continue to deliver a full program of goods and services given the many challenges present in the current operating environment. Accountability for delivering on our agreements in a professional manner was seen as tantamount to success.

This report also represents the synthesis of many generously provided ideas about accountability. Numerous internal and external sources were tapped for this effort. Accountability Task force members represent the broad spectrum of perspectives on this subject as well as diverse professional training and backgrounds, gender and cultural characteristics, levels in the organization, and geographic locations. The members are listed inside the front cover of this report.

Current Situation

It is clear that programs are much more complex today than ever before.

To create a base for its analysis, the task force took a pulse of the current situation. Sample program areas identified by Chief and Staff were used to gather information on accountability from all levels of the Agency. In addition, external oversight groups–the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the General Accounting Office (GAO), were tapped as valuable sources of information.

In looking at the current situation, the task force found that the changing work environment has complicated our ability to do what we agreed to do. This environment includes an expanding pool of partners and communities–local, national and international. Other agencies have been charged with implementing, overseeing and regulating programs that overlap with the work of the Forest Service. Some of these agencies at the national level include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). State, local and not-for-profit agencies, interested citizen groups, individuals and the media also exercise increased scrutiny.

At a time when dollars are limited and external demands and expectations are high, the Agency is also adjusting to a work force that is diverse–both occupationally and culturally. Our employees offer a spectrum of values

which parallel the customers and communities served by Forest Service programs. In addition to this complexity, the Agency has a challenge to keep pace with a mounting number of mandates as well as increased public and government oversight. According to the findings indicated below, we must achieve an adequate integration of staffs, policies, and monitoring if the Agency is to fulfill its duties in a highly accountable manner.

Internal Survey: To assess the success of the organization in meeting the expectations of the public, Congress and auditing agencies, the task force had each deputy area submit information concerning some general areas (rather than program-specific), which would serve as good indicators of the state of accountability in the Forest Service. The Deputy Chiefs recommended 22 programs, and from further discussion with them and with Washington Office Staff Directors, the task force identified eight for further study through the distribution of questionnaires having to do with accountability in each of these eight program areas.

Survey responses came back on two levels. Those who addressed the procedural level generally indicated that accountability was adequate. These cases seemed to share the following characteristics: program expectations were high priority, specific, measurable, limited to one activity or program (usually at a single level of the organization), they had clearly identified customers, and had sufficient resources to meet the expectations.

In contrast, survey respondents who addressed a higher level of complexity (reporting on situations consisting of interdependent activities and programs) indicated that accountability was either lacking or more difficult to gauge. Here it was reported that program expectations came in functional pieces from numerous sources and were not coordinated. Policy and direction for complex programs often originated from a functional perspective at one level of the organization, only to be implemented at another level that lacks the appropriate functional specialists and must perform the prescribed tasks as collateral duties.

Current program directives are sometimes out-of-date and often not integrated.

Survey respondents indicated that where the program interfaces with other program areas, policy and direction are not integrated or coordinated. Keeping policy direction current also appears to be a problem, since outdated formal direction makes program success dependent on employee institutional memory and retention of interim memorandums.

Forest Service Employee Survey: In a recent survey of Forest Service employees, those interviewed were presented with the following question: "Forest Service management does not provide people like me with enough direction and structure to guide day-to-day decisions and activities. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, or don't know?" The responses included 96.7

percent of upper line officers either somewhat or strongly disagreeing with the statement. At the same time, 38 percent of GS-6 and below respondents said they either strongly or somewhat agreed. Hence, opportunities exist to improve understanding of direction and priorities, especially in the lower grade levels.

Outside audits confirm that we have the ability to identify problems but are slow to initiate corrective actions.

Outside Agency Audits: The Task Force also studied the findings of many of the outside reviews conducted on the Forest Service by organizations such as GAO and OIG.

Sixty percent of external audit Agency findings focused on our inability to either do what we agreed to do or were directed to do, or on the way we agreed to do it. Audits by the Office of the Inspector General and the U.S. General Accounting Office confirmed that we can and do identify problems, but we are slow to take effective corrective action. This was especially true in cases of our own reviews. It appears that in cases where there is not external attention to the issue as well as out internal attention corrective action is not a top priority.

[A more complete description of the current situation is contained in Appendix A.]

Scope of Accountability

Mere mention of the word "accountability" brings to mind different images for different people. The specific instances of accountability which surfaced are varied. Some examples include:

- Congress holding the Forest Service accountable for execution of its annual program of work.

- A Regional Office being accountable to the Washington Office for the region's success in meeting certain targets.

- An individual manager being held accountable for ethical conduct.

- A supervisor holding an employee accountable through the performance appraisal process.

This report is applicable to all of the above accountability situations. As such, the treatment of accountability herein transcends the more limited perspectives of accountability. It also draws from the writings of some very distinct literature streams which tend to focus on only one or a couple of accountability situation types (e.g., performance management).[1]

Despite the variety of different accountability situations, all raise key questions in four aspects.

1. Who is accountable?

2. To whom are they accountable?

Accountability applies to the entire Forest Service and to each individual in it.

The Forest Service as a whole is accountable, as are research stations, staff units, and individual employees. We are accountable to external sources—Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), partners, the public, the press, and professional associations. We are also accountable to internal sources—the Chief, line officers, supervisors, peers, and ourselves.

[1]For example, on a public agency's accountability to the taxpayers and to Congress see Light, Paul Monitoring Government. On being accountable for a healthy organizational environment see Bardwick, Judith (1991) Danger in the Comfort Zone or Senge, Peter (1990) The Fifth Discipline. On performance management, see the Forest Service Manual or any human resource management textbook. For a discussion of inspiring enhanced individual performance see Byham, William (1990) Zapp. Finally, on ethics and conduct see appropriate Office of Personnel Management, USDA and Forest Service Guidelines, as well as Rohr, John (1978) *Ethics for Bureaucrats*.

In all accountability situations, these first two aspects are always present: there is at least one party being held accountable, and a second party holding the first one accountable. (See Figure 1.)

Inappropriate behavior of one employee can damage the perceived accountability level of the entire Agency.

More completely, accountability applies to the Forest Service at the corporate level (servicewide), as well as to subunits and to the individuals within the Forest Service. The Forest Service is held accountable by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Congress for its combined performance. Likewise, organizational units such as regions, experiment stations, national forests and grasslands, ranger districts, and research work units are held accountable by the Chief and other line officers, as well as by their key customers. Individual employees are held accountable for their personal performance by their supervisors, peers, key customers, and the courts and also themselves. Aggregate accountability for the Forest Service then involves evaluation of accountability from the corporate to the individual level. Also, the implications of an accountability situation can often go beyond the parties involved in that situation, as in a case where inappropriate behavior of one or a few employees can do damage to the perceived accountability of the entire agency.

3. Are accountable items negotiable or mandatory?

Some things we are accountable for can be negotiated...

There are situations where the content of work agreements, and therefore what we are accountable for, is negotiable by the Forest Service, a subunit or an individual and times when it is not. For example, agreements on a timeline to complete and publish research findings on the habitat needs of a threatened species might be negotiable inside the Forest Service. The congressional direction of how much money to spend doing that research, however, is mandatory once it is included in an appropriation act.

but others are mandatory.

Time also can be a factor in shaping work agreements and more specifically in determining whether items are negotiable or mandatory. Sometimes agreements that are negotiable at one point may become mandatory later. For example, the Forest Service can negotiate with the Congress on how much timber it will offer for sale during the appropriations process. However, once that process is complete, the level is fixed.

Similarly, agreements that are sometimes negotiable between some organizational levels are not at other levels. For example, the mix of wildlife habitat improvements versus wildlife inventory conducted may be negotiated between the regional forester and the Chief but the mix is not negotiable or only negotiable within narrower bounds between the regional forester and a forest supervisor.

Some agreements are internal to the Forest Service & some involve external parties.

Also alluded to earlier is that some agreements are developed solely inside the Forest Service and some involve external sources. Those agreements with parties from outside the Forest Service are more likely to be mandatory and often are monitored by external organizations. Regulations on contracting developed in the Department, and congressional intentions included in appropriations acts monitored by the General Accounting Office are examples of mandatory work agreements with external parties.

4. Are accountable items primarily process oriented or results oriented?

Accountability can be focused on the expected results...

Accountability applies to both results and processes for achieving results. Although many people would be happy if the agreements focused on the intended results only and left the processes to reaching the results to the discretion of the people who are delivering on the agreement, in reality some agreements intentionally focus on processes that must be used to achieve results. For example, many of the Government-wide regulations on contracting, financial management, and merit selection of personnel focus on process rather than results. These process requirements often constitute non-negotiable work agreements that are an important and necessary part of accountability of a public agency.

or the process used to get the results.

Thus, given these four aspects, (who is accountable?, to whom?, for a mandatory or negotiable item?, which is primarily results or process oriented?) one could easily think of situations involving various combinations of them. Figure 2 shows some examples of situations in which the Forest Service, a subunit or an individual employee is responsible for different types of accountability items, including mandatory, negotiable, results oriented, and process oriented. It also demonstrates that accountability situations are further complicated by the fact that what people are accountable for (the subject of the work agreements) can vary as well. Remember, the Forest Service, a subunit or an individual employee can be held accountable for mandatory or negotiable items that are results or process oriented. Figure 2 contains some examples.

Accountability Defined

Accountability is being answerable for what we do.

Given the plethora of situations in which the Forest Service is held accountable and the importance of accountability for the Forest Service's future, a clear definition was necessary. The following definition is offered:

Accountability is being answerable for what we do.

An elaboration on this definition that addresses the necessary breadth of accountability is:

An elaboration on the definition is ...

We must do what we agreed or are directed to do; as we agreed or are required to do it; monitor and show our results; and take action to improve results.

Management of Work Agreements, then, is an appropriate way to think of how we can be answerable for what we do in the future. Management of Work Agreements is the avenue for achieving a higher level of performance and being answerable for what we do.

Although this elaboration on the definition becomes more clear through the text of the report that follows, it is appropriate at this point to say that a number of factors influenced the form of this elaboration. It reflects the broad scope of accountability situations, recognizes the need for a progressive organizational environment, and identifies some desirable future behavior for Forest Service employees. Some specific parts of this elaboration on the accountability definition are shown below with some clarifying examples.

"...do what we agreed..."

Delivering the agreed upon product—for example, managing range conditions, being good FS hosts.

"...or are directed to do..."

Delivering the product directed by higher authority—for example, managing as directed, following congressional intent.

"...as we agreed..."

Delivering the product within the agreed-upon parameters—for example within a prescribed time-frame, consistent with land management planning process.

"...or are required to do it..."

Delivering the product within legal, regulatory, and policy parameters—for example, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and procurement regulations.

"...monitor and show our results..."

Providing oversight and documenting that we are following through and delivering the expected product. Examples include; management information, Congressional Reporting, record keeping, management reviews, and other communication channels relevant to accountability.

"...and take action to improve the results."

Making adjustments to the agreements or future management actions; for example, evaluating customer satisfaction, adjusting priorities, addressing performance problems, and presenting awards.

To the entire corporate enterprise (the Forest Service as a whole), all subunits and to each individual employee in the Forest Service, successful Management of Work Agreements is useful in approaching accountability situations ranging from our corporate ability to meet congressional intent to a national forest producing the expected level of recreation services, and to individual employees appropriately handling ethics and conduct situations.

Management of Work Agreements is the tool for being answerable for what we do–for being accountable.

Two Schools of Thought on Improving Accountability in the Forest Service

During the course of the task force's deliberations, it sought perspectives on accountability from its members, from members of Chief & Staff, from hundreds of Forest Service employees, from management and communications consultants, and from key customers and stakeholders. Rarely short on opinions about accountability, these professionals were generally quick to share their advice on improving accountability in the Forest Service.

Perspectives on accountability generally fall into two schools of thought.

Suggestions for improving accountability generally fell into one of two predominant schools of thought, which we labeled **back-to-basics** and **empower-the-workforce**. Though approaching accountability from very different perspectives, both these schools of thought provided valuable insights, concepts, and recommendations that the task force used to build the proposed accountability process.

Each school has something to contribute and neither alone is enough.

Interestingly, proponents of each school saw the seeds for the Forest Service's accountability problems in the ideas offered by the other school, and therefore saw the two schools as being polar opposites from which an either/or choice was all that was possible. In reality, neither school alone is enough to address the agency's problems of accountability nor are they as incompatible as they may appear. In fact, the central tenets of each school were integrated to construct the "Successful Management of Work Agreements" proposal, articulated in this document. This was done in full recognition that the most strident supporters of the two schools would probably object to the inclusion of any of the other school's concepts. We believe that a more careful study of the subject would convince most people that accountability in the future can best be influenced by this new, integrated approach, which draws from both schools.

For each of these schools of thought, this section briefly describes the school's perspective on accountability and its tangible contribution to improving accountability as well as the limitations of adopting just that one school.

Back-to-Basics

Back-to-basics offers three essential ingredients of accountability...

This school articulates a position that the Forest Service and its employees would best benefit from a return to some management basics: "many of the accountability tools utilized in the past and already available to Forest Service managers should be either reinstated or utilized more completely." This school believes, for example, that we are not successfully using audits, inspections, and other similar review tools. This school also believes that

"too much loosening up" of direction and "unbounded empowerment" are large parts of the problem.

Tangible contributions

The back-to-basics school helped us realize that many aspects of accountability come from basic management ideas that have been around for years. From this school of thought, we developed **three central ingredients of accountability.** Without all three ingredients, accountability will probably not exist. They are (1) clarifying the objectives or expected outcomes of agreements, (2) checking progress toward the accomplishment of these agreements, and (3) making whatever adjustments are necessary, based upon how well the objectives of the agreement were accomplished to hold people answerable and to improve future performance.

clarifying agreements to be sure that everyone knows the objective...

Clarifying agreements. It is essential to be clear about the work which is being agreed to, and how it will be accomplished. If reasonable people interpret the objectives of a work agreement differently, then the objectives are not clear enough. If the scope and content of the agreement are left intentionally vague to permit a broad degree of latitude in implementation, then the resulting variance of accomplishment within those broad bounds must be accepted.

The agreements can be documented and communicated in a number of ways, including laws, regulations, ethical standards and guidelines, court orders, interagency agreements, memoranda of understanding, Chief and Staff decisions, environmental compliance documents, land management plans, closeout agreements, public statements, press releases, and individual/unit programs of work.

checking progress on accomplishing the agreements...

Checking progress. Checking the progress of work is essential. The old adage, "you don't get what you expect in life, only what you inspect," fits here. Because the objective of checking on progress is to achieve as high a level of accomplishment as possible, implementation of the most important agreements should be checked during performance periods as well as at their ends. Midterm milestones should be established and used for comparison.

Like the work agreement itself, the method of the checking process can take a number of forms. Some examples include monitoring and evaluation of regularly scheduled reports (monthly, quarterly, or annually), automated tracking systems (MARS, TSPIRS), field visits, audits, investigations, testimony, performance appraisals, feature stories, general management reviews, and periodic self-appraisals. No one way of checking progress is always best, and the methods are not mutually exclusive. Program reviews conducted by higher levels in the organization are appropriate sometimes, but not always. Self-assessment is appropriate always, but is not always the only appropriate means of checking progress on the achievement of the

work called for in the agreements. Peer reviews can also be a successful method of checking progress.

If an activity is important enough to warrant a work agreement, it is important enough for a progress check to be made.

and making adjustments.

Making adjustments. Work accomplishment must be evaluated against the objectives of the original agreement and appropriate adjustments must be made to correct for low performance or to continue a high level of performance in the future. Each work agreement should have known adjustments associated with its successful and unsuccessful accomplishment. People should not have to wait until the work is completed to know the consequences of a high or low level of performance. Feedback should be timely. These evaluations should serve as the core for deciding levels of performance.

Each of these three ingredients can be accomplished in a number of different ways.

Similar to the variety of possible means of checking progress, there is a broad range of adjustments which are possible. This full range should be considered and utilized, as different situations call for different adjustments. Some examples of adjustments include reallocation of resources (both funding and personnel), changing priorities between work agreements, amending or updating the objectives of agreements, seeking legislative relief, publicizing good work, offering positive reinforcement, penalizing bad performance, changing organizational structure, altering communication patterns, transferring lessons learned to other units, and providing necessary training.

In this wide array of possible adjustments, no one way is always best, and they are not mutually exclusive. For example, additional training, reallocation of resources, and even modification of objectives of the agreement itself could all occur simultaneously.

Performance ratings are important, but all adjustments cannot and should not be focused through performance standards alone.

Performance ratings deserve a special note, for they are often thought of as the primary means of making adjustments to reflect how well the agreements were accomplished. It is appropriate to reflect the degree of accomplishment of an agreement in an employee's performance rating if the person's performance really can and does affect the degree of accomplishment. But it is almost never sufficient to restrict the range of adjustments considered to performance ratings alone. Only when a single performance standard is truly treated as a pass/fail test, where not accomplishing that one standard means that the individual's entire performance is less than satisfactory, will performance reviews alone be enough to ensure accountability. If the single standard is not treated as a pass/fail criterion, then performance on that single standard is so blended with other measures that its effect becomes totally obscured. In other words, we strongly recommend against relying on performance ratings as the universal solution for improving accountability.

Limits of back-to-basics

Back-to-basics alone is not enough given the complexity of Forest Service programs...

The back-to-basics school's contribution of three ingredients is important. However, taken alone, the back-to-basics approach has serious limitations. Managers who simply go back to basics and rely exclusively on the three ingredients will not significantly improve the accountability within their spheres of influence. Employees will not maximize performance in this kind of work environment. Back-to-basics purists ignore today's changed work environment, different workforce, and clear need for program integration.

Forest Service programs are now extremely complex. Although they have never been simple, their complexity has increased dramatically in recent years. The competition between management options is more intertwined and the scientific information that must be considered in making a decision has increased significantly. The breadth of programs is also much broader today, which adds to the complexity of managers' and leaders' jobs. Hence, accountability must now take into account the multitude of programs *and* their interdependencies. No longer is it acceptable to view programs such as timber, wildlife, and recreation as functionally separate. Now their overlaps, synergies, and interdependencies are just as important.

tight funding...

Funding is also becoming increasingly tight. Sometimes complexity can be overcome with abundant staffing and financial resources, but that option is gradually disappearing with the shrinking budget. Although challenge cost-shares, partnerships, and volunteers partially overcome the need for as much Federal funding, dwindling Federal resources still remove important flexibility. Hence we must better focus the resources we do have on high priority work agreements.

assertive customers...

The Forest Service's customers are becoming more assertive. As their expectations grow and as they have to work harder and harder to achieve Federal funding for their favored programs in the increasingly tight Federal funding arena, they are scrutinizing the Forest Service's performance ever more closely. The increased breadth of Forest Service programs also adds to the number and diversity of customers that are tracking and evaluating Forest Service performance.

and the increasingly diverse Forest Service workforce.

The Forest Service's work force itself is also increasingly diverse and assertive. Increased diversity means that there is a decreased likelihood that the meaning of the work agreements will be as universally understood or automatically agreed to by the work force. With increased work force diversity, it is essential to have processes that cultivate shared understanding and commitment. Similar to society at large, there is a lower likelihood that the workforce will readily accept a command and control delivery of direction, no matter how clearly articulated.

Given these trends (multiple and overlapping programs and assertive customers and employees), a functional manager implementing these three ingredients independently will surely create conflicting directions from other managers. The result will be excessive directions that are infeasible given the financial resources available and directions that are not necessarily compatible. It also will lead to a low level of ownership by the workforce and customers which is essential for its accomplishment.

Summary of back-to-basics

Basics—yes! Back—no! We have extracted three useful accountability ingredients from the back-to-basics school:

(1) Clarifying agreements
(2) Checking progress
(3) Making adjustments

However, more than these ingredients is needed to improve accountability in the Forest Service of today and tomorrow. A strong need exists to specifically address the organizational context of the Forest Service. To meet this need, we next turn to the second major school of thought on accountability.

Empower-the-Workforce

Empower-the-workforce offers strategies to a progressive organizational culture where...

This school believes that the foundation for accountability in the Forest Service is a progressive work environment in which employees are empowered. The empower-the-workforce school says that educated, committed workers will be more accountable when given the freedom to be innovative, creative, and take risks. Its prescriptions are aimed at providing work structure, culture, and environment that empower the employees. This school believes that many of the rules and management systems set up to improve accountability reflect a command and control management style that is ineffective in today's world.

Tangible contributions

The empower-the-workforce school articulates **three strategies** that directly apply to accountability in this Forest Service of the future. The strategies are prescriptions for bringing about that desired organizational culture.

The three strategies are (1) sharing leadership, (2) attending to human resources and the work environment, and (3) focusing on the customer. These strategies directly overlap with the organization that the Forest Service is seeking to become as described in the "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles for the Forest Service."

leadership is shared...

Sharing leadership. Create an environment of shared leadership in which supervisors and their employees jointly establish expectations, participate in problem solving and decision making, and share accountability for their results.

Shared leadership facilitates improved accountability by enhancing communications and by strengthening commitment to carry out work agreements. Sharing of leadership leads to a larger sense of involvement of employees and key partners. However, it does not mean the abdication of responsibility by the appropriate Forest Service officials.

Throughout the organization, we found a variety of interpretations of the phrase *shared leadership*. Some focused on the positive aspects, others on the negative. This report suggests that the phrase refers to an organizational climate that is generally participatory and favors inclusion of people in decision making processes. Thus, shared leadership is not an autocratic environment in which decisions are made by those at the top and handed down as commands, but neither is it an environment in which everyone is involved in everything or where everybody makes whatever decisions they want on anything.

Implicit in this description of shared leadership is a belief that flexibility is essential and that levels of involvement, the form of decision making processes, and role assignments will vary depending on the characteristics of that particular situation. This definition acknowledges the appropriateness in certain instances of managers making decisions with little or no involvement. It also accepts the notion that a particular project may call for a supervisor to serve as a team member while a uniquely skilled subordinate serves as team leader. Hence, shared leadership will be manifested differently in different situations.

Finally, shared leadership should not be interpreted as being whatever the participants in the situation want it to be. Shared leadership is driven by an objective of high performance through effective human interactions. In many cases, the performance standard, decision process, roles, and other organizational elements are givens and not negotiable. Hence, one or many of the characteristics associated with shared leadership may not be possible in these instances.

attention is given to the human resource and work environment...

Attending to human resources and the work environment. Create a work environment where employees are well trained and equipped to do their jobs, where innovation and creativity are accepted and nurtured, and where employees feel valued and responsible and are thus encouraged and enabled to demonstrate their accountability.

This strategy emphasizes the need to take seriously the saying that "our people are our most valuable resource." It also implicitly embraces a belief that employees want to do a good job and want to be responsible and accountable.

and there is a focus on the customer.

Focusing on the customer. Recognize that all of our actions must be oriented to meet our customers' expectations, and that we are accountable to our customers for results.

This strategy underscores the importance of the full range of internal and external customers we serve, as the true measurers of our performance. All of our work must be checked against the expectations of these many and varied interests including other employees, the public, the administration, the Congress and others.

Limits of empower-the-workforce

Empower-the-workforce alone is not enough. Especially in a public agency in which many results and processes are not negotiable, some formal means of ensuring accountability are necessary.

Taken alone, the empower-the-workforce school, is also inadequate. Relying exclusively on the three strategies is to argue that improving the work environment will automatically lead to a high level of accomplishment of the objectives in work agreements. Given the realities of modern-day public organizations, more formal means of insuring and checking accountability are necessary. If the Forest Service operated completely independently, it might be well served by following this school of thought exclusively. However, the reality is that the Forest Service operates in a highly interdependent environment in which key stakeholders, customers, the media, and the public all demand performance and complete reporting of that performance. The American public also demands that individual employees are held accountable for all of their actions in an effort to prohibit waste, fraud, and abuse. Finally, for some emplyees, the notion of empowerment with sharing of broad responsibilities is not consistent with their desire for a "job" with a narrow and specific prescription of the work to be done.

Summary of empower-the-workforce

The empower-the-workforce school articulates three useful strategies:

(1) Sharing leadership
(2) Attending to human resources and the work environment
(3) Focusing on customers

This strong attention to the human side of managing work agreements is well grounded. However, given the realities of managing a public agency, exclusively embracing this school would be ineffective and inappropriate.

Proposal: Successful Management of Work Agreements

Integration of the Two Schools: Successful Management of Work Agreements

Though the two schools of thought appear mutually exclusive, they must be integrated for a comprehensive response.

As has been mentioned previously, neither of the two schools of thought alone is sufficient for improving the Forest Service's accountability. Yet when the best of the empower-the-workforce school and the best of the back-to-basics school are combined, a proposal for accountability emerges that is appropriate for the contemporary challenges facing the Forest Service. It is called *Successful Management of Work Agreements*.

This approach did not result from simply building one school onto the other in an additive fashion. What was required was an integration of the back-to-basics ingredients with the empower-the-workforce strategies to create this new framework for accountability. Like the reaction of two gaseous hydrogen molecules and one gaseous oxygen molecule to create one liquid water molecule (H_2O), the central themes of these two schools can be integrated into a new framework for accountability. The act of clarifying agreements, for example, is fundamentally altered when done in an environment of shared leadership and customer focus. The work agreements must be clarified in a shared leadership environment but those sharing leadership must produce a clear work agreement that everyone understands. Figures 3 is a simple description of how these pieces flowed together to produce this proposal.

Accountability Goal

By way of introduction to the accountability proposal, we first look at how we would behave in the future if we were truly living in an accountable fashion. Looking ahead, the Forest Service's future goal for accountability is to:

...achieve a leadership and organizational culture where responsibility and accountability for excellence are shared by all employees in the execution of the Forest Service's "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles."

Two Components of the Proposal

Successful Management of Work Agreements consists of two primary components. The first prescribes some specific behaviors that will characterize the accountable organization of the Future. We call this components, *Future Behavior*. The second component, called the *Seven Step Scheme*, presents a structured way to manage work agreements. Together they constitute an opportunity for the Forest Service to put focused attention on accountability and increase its level within the organization. Doing this requires focused attention on changing individual and organizational behavior to reflect the proposal.

Proposal Component 1: Future Behavior

How we must behave in the future.

The first component of the proposal focuses on how we must behave in the future to improve accountability in the Forest Service. This is not to say that we don't behave like this now at some times and in some places, but it is critical that we do so pervasively in the future.

True accountability in the Forest Service will be manifested and achieved through the ways that Forest Service employees behave, individually and in aggregate. Accountability is not primarily about words or ideas, it is about behavior—behavior that, individually and collectively, leads to Forest Service performance that achieves what was agreed to or makes necessary adjustments if it was not achieved.

This future behavior proposal starts to unfold through the eyes of the organizational strategies offered by the empower-the-workforce perspective and then applies those strategies to the ingredients of accountability through the eyes of the back-to-basics perspective.

Shared Leadership for Accountability

Shared leadership, with emphasis on accountability.

Create an environment of shared leadership in which supervisors and their employees jointly establish expectations, participate in problem solving and decision making, and share accountability for results. Applying the ingredients of accountability from the back-to-basics school to future behavior should result in behaviors such as the following:

- All leaders serve as role models of the highest ethics and integrity.
- Leaders determine and communicate priorities in a collaborative manner that involves subordinates, the public, customers, partners, and others with an interest in results.
- Leaders carry out oversight commensurate with vulnerability assessments.
- Leaders emphasize and strengthen information sharing so that employees fully understand the context of agency work and their contribution to it.

(a more complete list is presented in chart 1):

Attention to the Human Resource and the Work Environment for Accountability

Attention to the human resource and work environment, with an emphasis on accountability.

Create a work environment where employees are well trained and equipped to do their jobs, where innovation and creativity are accepted and nurtured, and where employees feel valued and responsible and are thus encouraged and accountable. Applying the ingredients should result in the following future behaviors

- Managers ensure that all employees are well trained and equipped to do their jobs.
- Managers foster a work environment in which all employees welcome constructive feedback on performance and where prompt and appropriate recognition strengthens accountability of individuals and units throughout the organization.

(a more complete listing is presented in chart 2):

Focusing on the Customer for Accountability

Focus on the customer, with an emphasis on accountability.

Recognize that all of our actions must be oriented to meet our customer expectations, and that we are accountable to our customers for results. The following behaviors will lead to this result

- Managers take active measures to sense our publics and their expectations, and we are responsive in our actions and communications to their input and involvement.
- Customers are involved and included in oversight processes, as well as in determining adjustments resulting from monitoring activities.

(a more complete list is presented in chart 3):

Validating the Proposed Future Behavior

The proposed futures behaviors were validated against a number of accountability situations.

In order to ensure that the future behaviors would in fact improve accountability, they were applied to representative types of challenges the Forest Service faces in its day to day operations. Appropriate future behaviors were projected into each situation to see whether those behaviors would improve accountability.

The following cases and programs were studied: the America the Beautiful Tree Planting Program; the Incident Command System for firefighting management; special-use permit administration; the working capital fund method of financing vehicles and equipment; and timber volume sold per unit cost. The results of these validations lead to the following general conclusions:

1. In all cases, the future behaviors were seen to be compatible with high accountability. In no case would utilization of the future behaviors contribute to lowered accountability.

2. The future behaviors were seen to foster better integration across functions. Often the current approaches to accountability are too narrowly focused.

3. The future behaviors were found to improve performance quicker and more substantially. By involving the implementers of work throughout a work agreement's life cycle, for example, they are better able to make the necessary adjustments and able to do so quickly. Such an approach was found to be far superior to waiting until the completion of a project and having a formal review conducted by higher ranking personnel.

Validating the future behaviors was an important step in having the confidence to prescribe them for the organization. Subsequent to that validation, a series of practical "Do's & Don'ts of Accountability" were developed which show the behaviors being applied to very specific organizational situations. They are shown in their entirety in Appendix B.

Chart 1—Sharing leadership

Clarifying agreements

- Forest Service leaders—whether those in established positions such as line officers, staff members, principle scientists, work crew chiefs, fire bosses, etc. or in ad hoc positions such as committee chairpersons or task force leaders, as well as individuals in their work group settings—jointly establish expectations, participate in problem solving, and decision making and share accountability for results.
- All leaders serve as role models of highest ethics and integrity.
- All leaders consistently realize appropriate positive and negative consequences for their actions.
- All leaders accept the responsibility for being informed of, and are committed to complying with, applicable laws, regulations, policies, and directives.
- All leaders determine and communicate priorities in a collaborative manner that involves subordinates, public, customers, partners, and others with an interest in results.
- All leaders place value on developing integrated responses to issues and problems and eliminating excessive direction.

Checking progress

- All leaders provide timely feedback, foster change, and provide positive or negative consequences when warranted.
- All leaders identify adjustments that are needed and act, rather than wait for someone else to point out the need.
- All leaders carry out oversight commensurate with vulnerability assessments.
- All leaders focus oversight on quality results and required monitoring processes.

Making adjustments

- National forests are an open environment for addressing agency work in which all employees are encouraged to share their views and in which individual values are respected. Authority and power are shared with all employees. All employees accept responsibility for results.
- All leaders emphasize and strengthen information sharing and communication concerning key issues, challenges, and priorities so employees fully understand the context of agency work and their contributions to it.

Chart 2—Attending to human resource needs

Clarifying agreements	■ Leaders emphasize employees' understanding the Forest Service's mission, principles, policies, and practices throughout their careers through formal training programs, quality work experiences, and work practices. ■ All employees are well trained and equipped to do their jobs.
Checking progress	■ Managers foster a work environment in which all employees welcome constructive feedback on performance and where prompt and appropriate recognition strengthens the accountability of individuals and units throughout the organization. ■ Managers at all levels maximize multicultural and interdisciplinary ideas related to oversight and integration of programs.
Making adjustments	■ Employees from all levels actively participate in oversight mechanisms that assess individual and unit performance and accountability.

Chart 3—Focusing on the customer

Clarifying agreements	■ The work force is made aware of the increased role of the public and public expectations. We actively take measure to sense our publics and their expectations and are responsive in our actions and communications to their input and involvement.
Checking progress	■ The views, concerns, and opinions of partners, customers, and the public are considered in all aspects of accountability. They are involved and included in oversight processes, as well as in determining adjustments resulting from monitoring activities.
Making adjustments	■ Customers are asked for feedback, which is used to guide adaptations and changes as needed.

Proposal Component 2: Seven Step Scheme

The second component is an integrated seven-step scheme to accountability.

If the accountability goal and future behaviors describe the desired future that we seek, the next question is, what sort of procedures will get us there? A seven-step scheme is proposed here to lead us toward these behaviors and improved accountability. This integrated scheme starts, through the eyes of the back-to-basics perspectives, then build in the strategies of the empower-the-workforce view. These steps fully integrate the three basic ingredients and the three organizational behavior strategies, since both are necessary and neither alone is sufficient to reach our goal of accountability.

This accountability scheme is proposed as both a conceptual and a practical tool for managing our work and for increasing our accountability. The seven steps are applicable all the way from the corporate level to the individual level. They can be applied formally with associated documentation and signed approval, as in annual performance standards or allocations of annual budgets, or informally as in thinking through work priorities among peers. The scheme is not proposed as a solution to any particular accountability situation but rather as an integrated series of steps that will focus attention and activities which will lead to a high level of accountability.

1. Establish Work Agreements, Including Measures and Standards

Establish work agreements in a participatory manner, understanding that some are negotiable and some are mandatory.

All parties in a work agreement need to share understanding of the agreement, agree on appropriate measures and standards, and establish the agreement in a participatory manner.

- Involve the client/customer
- Make the *what, when, where, how, and why* of the agreement clear
- Maximize shared commitment to completion
- Establish the bounds within which creativity can occur and the consistency or uniformity that must exist; milestones and end-result measurers; and legal, regulatory, and other constraining factors
- Seek innovative and creative measures and standards, wherever possible, that emphasize integration of functional disciplines and result in meaningful indicators

Beginning with step #1, the integration of the two schools is apparent. A premium is placed on being clear about the work to be done, yet, at the same time, this step must be participatory and set in the larger context.

As the normal course of business, it should no longer be acceptable in the Forest Service to rely on distribution of work assignments down through functional and line channels without broader participation by those who

must implement the agreement and by the key customers. Likewise, assignments can no longer be viewed as isolated pieces of work. Their relationships to other assignments must be carefully considered, because the interrelationships and aggregate work accomplishments are key to accountability in the Forest Service.

The Total Quality Management movement makes us acutely aware of the need for objective performance criteria. Measures and standards serve as indicators of the work accomplished and become the shared language for evaluating performance. They also establish the bounds within which performance is to occur. Measures and standards should be discussed in the earliest stages of establishing work agreements. If the measures of acceptable performance cannot be agreed upon, then in reality, the work agreement is incomplete. Likewise, when priorities are being established or changed, measures and standards should be addressed again to ensure mutual understanding of the expectations of the agreement.

2. Set Priorities Among Work Agreements

Set priorities among work agreements.

Reviewing previous work agreements in light of the new work agreement and setting priorities among work agreements is essential in this era of ever-expanding work demands.

- Establish larger context for role in which individual work agreements fit
- Identify interrelationships with other work agreements and management objectives
- Adjust other agreements as needed (this may require customer/client involvement)
- Utilize diversity of perspectives in arriving at shared set of priorities

This second step makes explicit the fact that work agreements are not made in isolation. Hand-in-hand with the establishment of new work agreements comes the responsibility to review previous work agreements and to set priorities among work agreements accordingly. Given the burgeoning expanse of work opportunities that lies before the Forest Service, particular attention must be placed here. Setting priorities was a recurring theme during our interviews with employees and key external sources. Priorities must be constantly re-evaluated, then set and agreed upon in a participatory fashion, recognizing of course, that non-negotiable agreements remain top priorities. Finally, customers' involvement in priority setting can be very useful in better understanding their expectations and in getting them to buy into a program of work.

3. Check Progress

Periodically check progress on achievement of work agreements.

Work progress must be assessed periodically with the responsible employee or organizational unit taking the initiative to make self-assessments and discuss progress with whomever is holding them accountable. Progress checks are the primary vehicles for ensuring project success and organizational learning, and not merely times to "check up" on those responsible for implementing the agreement.

- Oversee progress throughout the life of the agreement
- Include those actually implementing the agreement (doing the work)
- Allow for variation in specific activities, ranging from progress reports to on-site management reviews/audits
- Involve the customer
- Look for continuous improvement in performance and continual growth and development of employees

Checking progress underscores the notion that if the work is of enough importance to build an agreement, it is important enough to make progress checks. Progress checks should be seen as primary vehicles for ensuring the success of projects and not merely as times to check up on workers. Measures and standards (discussed in step #1) should be utilized extensively in the checking process. The earlier checks are made, the sooner adjustments can be made to ensure success. In fact, some of the most useful checks occur early in the performance cycle. This is consistent with the idea that information gained during checking is valuable for individual and organizational learning and improvement. This embodies the focus on attending to human resources and the work environment.

4. Define Adjustments

Define what adjustments are appropriate, also in a participatory manner.

Necessary adjustments for ensuring success must be made in a participatory manner. Increased participation in this step often helps broaden the range of adjustments considered and increases the probability of success. Adjustments can range all the way from revising work agreements and providing more funding to rewarding and punishing the people or organization primarily responsible for the expected outcome.

- Adjust work agreement aspects that are negotiable
- Adjust roles, responsibilities, information, technology, organization structure, time frame, training, etc.
- Involve implementers of the agreements
- Involve those responsible for implementing adjustments

This step refers to the process of identifying, analyzing, and deciding upon the types of adjustments that must be made once the results from the progress checks are available. In the case of non-negotiable agreements,

adjustments regarding roles, responsibilities, information, technology, funding, communication patterns, and others are prime candidates for consideration. In the case of a negotiable agreement, changes to the agreement, such as timeline standards and measures, should be added to the list of possible adjustments. A participatory approach to developing, analyzing and deciding upon adjustments is recommended. Inviting implementers and customers can add valuable perspectives and commitments. A shared-leadership approach to defining what adjustments to make can pay big performance dividends. Yet the decision making—explaining who will be involved and who will actually make the decision—must be clear. Within a public organization, responsible officials can not abdicate their official responsibilities.

5. Implement Adjustments

Implement the adjustments, and monitor them enough to see if they work.

Follow through in making the necessary adjustments to ensure success and monitor enough to see if the intended results occur. Without actually implementing the adjustment, for example rewards and punishments, we really are not being answerable for what we do.

- Implement adjustments to work agreements or processes
- Assertively and consistently use full range of rewards and penalties to influence performance at organization, unit and individual levels
- Follow-through indicates seriousness about maintaining a healthy work environment

This is the step of carrying out the adjustments defined in step #4. Earlier we cautioned against over-reliance on the performance appraisal system. Broad involvement in defining the adjustments (step #4) should help to generate the desired breadth of opportunities for adjustment and to build commitment to implementing the adjustments and also encourage innovation and creativity in implementing the adjustments. Where appropriate, the implementers can be relied on to take responsibility for applying the adjustments. Because accountability is applicable at all levels in the organization (from corporate level to individual employee), adjustments should be developed and implemented at the appropriate organizational levels of relevant to the work agreement.

6. Demonstrate and Communicate Results

Demonstrate work agreement accomplishments.

In addition to accomplishing the work agreement, we must also demonstrate and communicate those results in ways that are meaningful to our key customers, to those who hold us accountable, and to ourselves.

- Show and communicate results in understandable and meaningful ways to key customers
- Keep records that can demonstrate results

- Identify interrelationships, implications, and benefits to other agreements and management objectives

It is not enough for us to do good work. We must also demonstrate and communicate those results in ways that are meaningful to our key customers as well as to ourselves. For compliance with the Chief Financial Officer Act, for example, we must prepare a completely documented audit trail for all performance information. For the inquisitive public or press, this documentation might mean communication of a complicated environmental assessment through on-the-ground trips and face-to-face dialogues. Regardless of the accountability situation, our work does not end with completion of the objectives of the work agreement. Demonstrating and documenting results are integral parts of the accountability framework.

7. Conduct Performance Feedback Loops

Review overall performance across all work agreements and make adjustments.

We must continue to learn from past experiences to adjust overall work agreements and ways they are developed both by the individual and organization levels through self-assessment and by whomever is holding the implementing individual or organization accountable.

- Give clear feedback about to all previous steps
- Conduct final, straightforward critique of performance
- Share insights with all parties involved in work agreement and also with others not involved in the agreement who can benefit from the information

The final step in the accountability scheme emphasizes learning from our experiences and not just making adjustments for individual agreements, but considering adjustments in the entire organizational framework. In many ways it is inappropriate to show it as the last step because the evaluation and transfer of learning should be going on continuously and recycling back to all of the previous steps. Here, however, we formally transfer the insights from an honest critique to other existing and future work agreements. This will also help us look across functional and organizational boundaries for applications of this learning.

Another way to translate the proposed future behaviors and proposed accountability scheme is through the simple list of do's and don'ts which was mentioned earlier. For example, we should get people who must accomplish the work agreements involved in developing the objectives of the agreement. We should not simply establish those objectives unilaterally without participation. Similarly, we should determine whether the objects are consistent with the objectives in a program vacuum. Appendix B details do's and don'ts which were derived from the seven step scheme.

Implementation Actions to Improve Accountability

As was mentioned above, the Forest Service can improve accountability by merely embracing the successful Management of Work Agreements proposal explained in this report. Changing behavior and using the seven step scheme in day to day work are at the heart of making progress in this important area. Such an embrace does not require a major financial outlay, but instead calls for a significant commitment on the part of the organization to change.

It is an organizational behavior axiom that change only occurs when the need has been clearly demonstrated, and the benefits of change are clearly seen. We believe the evidence on the need for increased accountability is compelling. We also believe the benefits from changing (increased efficiency, credibility and flexibility) are sought by virtually every employee. Thus we are at the point of "just doing it"!

To help the Forest Service embrace the proposal, a few high leverage implementation actions are offered below. They should not be interpreted as being the master plan for institutionalizing the proposal in the organization. As has been said, no master plan is needed: the committment to embrace the future behavior and the seven step scheme will quickly put us on the road to improved accountability. Rather, the implementation actions represent a blend of activities which will help "jumpstart" the effort and reinforce the organizational change. All of the actions are consistent with those being proposed by other related task forces such as, Balancing Career and Family Task Force, the Work Environment Task Force, and the Management and Supervisor Competencies Task Force.

1. Institutionalize corporate accountability expectations

A. Review current directive system. Revise to insure few, clear, concise, current, flexible, and integrated directions.

B. Assure that national priorities and commitments are developed in a shared leadership fashion to assure capability to produce.

2. Provide Accountability Training

A. Develop and incorporate an accountability module into existing training programs such as employee orientation, supervisory training, and leadership training. This training should include the following elements:

- Importance, definition and goal of accountability in the Forest Service

- Successful Management of Work Agreements approach (including Future Behaviors and Seven Steps)
- Accountability Benchmarks-including organizational successes and failures
- Definition and examples of shared leadership, empowerment, results oriented management and ethical behaviors
- Need for an intergrated approach to management
- Leadership ethics
- Benefits of accountability - From the perspective of customers, congress, the Forest Service, the sub-unit and the individual employee.

B. Develop and implement training for management team members to improve review skills.

3. Strengthen review process

A. Overhaul the management review system to:

- Emphasize program integration in planning and conduct of reviews
- Incorporate key indicators of unit accountability
- Focus reviews on results appropriate to review topic area (rather than on the mechanics of the review itself)
- Achieve agreement for change at the time of interaction (rather than through lengthy action plans).

B. Rename 1400 section Accountability.

C. Revise 1400 section to include Successful Management of Work Agreements proposal.

4. Recognition and consequences

A. Chief and Staff and RF&D annually recognized through peer selection the line officers/station directors within their respective groups who have demonstrated outstanding accountability in performing their duties.

B. Annually recognize outstanding examples of unit accountability that have been fostered by sharing of leadership.

C. At all levels, positively reward actions contributing to high accountability while actions which detract from high accountability receive negative feedback. Rewards and punishments are commensurate with the impact on accountability. Ethics and conduct of only the highest level are acceptable.

D. Ensure actions which detract from high accountability receive appropriate punishments and corrective action.

5. Promote organizational successes

A. Conduct evaluations of alternative agency organizational structures and operational approaches. These evaluations should be conducted by objective parties to identify effects on overall unit and individual accountability.

B. Clearly articulate strengths/weaknesses, and successes/failures found in evaluations.

C. Chief and Staff and RF&D actively support and promote those units implementing appropriate organization change (e.g., cultural & structural).

6. Accelerate cultural change

A. Develop a corporate definition of shared-leadership and guidance for implementation of shared leadership throughout the Forest Service.

B. Establish milestone measures of progress towards cultural change. For example;

- Integrated, ecosystem oriented budgets
- Fewer customer complaints
- Better integrated directives and information systems
- Change in agency skill mixes to meet future needs
- Budgets driven by current needs rather than out/year projections
- More holistic ecosystem orientation in how we work and how we appear
- Ensure there is honest communication between all employees
- Better able to manage "NO". Can't do everything or be everything to everybody. Need to set priorities and manage by them.

C. Establish and use selection criteria consistent with the Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles in the filling of all leadership positions.

D. Corporately support, promote, and implement proven leading edge, shared leadership experiences in the agency.

E. Incorporate team accountability performance expectations into the performance evaluation process.

F. Prepare and monitor national budget packages with a single, intergrated, full-time, budget team to eliminate mixed functional messages, and maintain a consistent product of budget strategy and accountability.

7. Monitor and track accountability through indicators or benchmarks

A. Establish, track and report corporate accountability indicators annually. Share with all employees.

B. Incorporate a discussion and evaluation of accountability efforts in the annual report of the Forest Service and in audited financial statements.

C. Obtain feedback to identify and keep current national accountability priorities.

Summary

Purposefully, accountability is framed here as the successful Management of Work Agreements. We believe that accountability is a matter of "delivering the goods," and that the goods are best delivered through careful structuring and managing of the agreements about those goods. Today the Forest Service does not use such an approach and, to many, is not delivering the goods.

We use the term *agreements* because it connotes the idea of multiple participants being involved in the delivery of the goods, exactly like the complex array of parties involved in delivering the Forest Service program of work. We also believe that some work agreements are negotiable and some are mandatory. Some are primarily internal to the Forest Service and some involve external sources. Some are results oriented and some more process focused; all agreements can be wisely managed.

The accountability proposal, with its call for changed behavior and a seven step scheme, helps manage the work agreement process in the context of our complex organization in these turbulent times. It integrates the basic accountability ingredients with the strategies for developing a progressive organizational environment. It recognizes the fact that Forest Service performance is scrutinized closely by a multitude of parties and occurs in an environment with some very real constraints. It also recognizes that all approaches in the Forest Service must strive to maximize opportunities for innovation, creativity, and individual development among its talented employees and work partners. Hence the proposal is offered as a conceptual and practical bridge to increased accountability and to future organizational success. Now we must do it.

APPENDIX A—Current Accountability Situation

The Forest Service's "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles" statement emphasizes our customer orientation. We listen to our communities and partners, engage them in carrying out our programs, and expect their high level of interest in and scrutiny of the outcomes and results that we achieve.

Our communities of interest and partners are increasingly diverse. They include local governments, tribal governments, states, counties, and communities far beyond the national forest boundaries. They include international communities of interest such as U.S. and foreign non-governmental organizations and international agencies. Other Federal agencies such as the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have congressional mandates that result in the establishment of standards and other requirements that influence what we can agree to do and how we are to do it.

Traditionally, the Forest Service has been a "can do" organization, able to take on additional charges and expectations through adaptive and flexible management of all its resources. Today's budget constraints, limits to human resource growth, and our responsibility to a wider array of agencies, laws and regulations, have forced managers to face the limits to what they can do. They have increased the need for managers to negotiate and reach agreement on **what they can and cannot do.**

Expansion of work and programs has not led to an expanded work force. Rather, a task that has full time attention at the national or regional level can become one among many collateral duties at the national forest, research station, and ranger district level. Thus, high national or regional expectations may remain unfulfilled at lower levels.

Communities are more culturally diverse, bringing new values, expectations and needs that we must address. With every public group, Congress, and new administration has come a greater need to see that our delivery meets their needs.

Combined with the additional laws and regulations, local, state, national, and international expectations, there are also added scientific and technical complexities. A wider array of professional and technical disciplines are now needed to address today's programs. Our functional areas are multidisciplined and require a greater degree of integration, of functional perspectives. Our behavior has been largely focused on a functional organization. Operating in a more integrated environment—either internal to

a program area, between agency staffs, or between partner agencies and organizations such as EPA—is an essential ingredient to doing what has been agreed to be done.

No major Forest Service policy topic or program can be handled by a single function or area. Most contemporary policy decisions and programs require total integration of resources and supporting activities.

Internal Survey of the Current Situation

To assess the success of the organization in meeting these expectations, each Deputy Chief's area was requested to identify program areas that could be used to gather some general, rather than program-specific, information on the current accountability situation. Based upon their suggestions and discussion with Washington Office staffs, the task force identified eight programs representing most Deputy Chiefs' areas from the 22 programs originally identified. Questionnairs were distributed to each of the eight program areas in search of insights about accountability in those area.

The internal current situation survey revealed a significant deterrent to achieving excellence in accountability as envisioned by the Forest Service's "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles." That deterrent was the lack of integration between the various functional areas.

Regarding more discrete, simply defined procedural activities surveyed—coordi nating congressional contacts, and implementing tropical forestry and State and Private Forestry grants–respondents generally indicated that "all went fairly well" with respect to accountability. In these situations, programs were narrow in scope, crisply defined, unentangled with other activities or programs, often did not require actions at all levels of the organization, were viewed as high priority, had clearly identified customers, and had sufficient resources available to meet the expectations.

In contrast, survey respondents indicated that the achievement of expectations in the broader-based and far-reaching programs—equal employment, sale preparation, salvage sale, recreation special uses—did not "go all that well." They reported that the work expectations came in functional pieces from numerous sources, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): the National Forest Management Act (NFMA); Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks; forest plans; the Code of Federal Regulations; contract administration and budget advice; congressional direction; Forest Service Chief and Staff policy decisions, and external agencies such as states and their agencies, EPA, and OSHA.

Technical direction has not kept pace with the changes and much information regarding accountability resides in the institutional memory of a small handful of individuals. Functional direction is not integrated to bring

all aspects into consideration in shaping policies and procedures are to be done and in setting priorities and agreements.

Moreover, it was reported that the focus is often on hard targets, which at times are in conflict with other existing requirements. Forest Service employees at the same time are trying to address ecosystem management philosophies and other efforts that call for extensive integration of targets, values, and expectations. Priorities, the resources available to meet them in many instances were considered poorly matched. Adjustments to expectations through setting of priorities did not occur consistently.

Our assessment of the current situation is that our organizational behavior has not adjusted to this new environment which calls for far greater functional integration.

The View from External Organizations

Select OIG/GAO Audits

In analyzing the current situation of accountability in the Forest Service, the Accountability task force examined the work the two oversight agencies: the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO). In order to gain an external perspective on Forest Service accountability, a review was made of several OIG and GAO audits conducted in Fiscal Years 1991 and 1992. Although the audits of these agencies are mainly focused on identifying problems by documenting agency shortfalls, they did provide insight into areas of accountability that required Task Force attention in making any recommendations for improvement in the future situation. Audits reviewed were from each Deputy Chief's area (with the exception of International Forestry): Programs and Legislation, National Forest Systems, Administration, Research, and State and Private Forestry.

The review focused on the components of accountability:

- **doing what we agreed or are directed to do**
- **as we agreed or are required to do it**
- **monitoring and showing results**
- **taking action to improve results**

External Information

From the audits reviewed, OIG and GAO reported a number of findings that required action on the part of the Forest Service to improve its compliance with laws, regulations, or internal controls necessary for the prevention of fraud, waste, and abuse. The following is a brief summary of where our oversight sources believe we fell short in the area of accountability:

- Not doing what we agreed to do or were directed to do—32%
- Not doing it as agreed to or were required to do it—28%
- Not monitoring or showing our results—17%
- Not taking action to improve results—2%

The remaining 21% of the findings by these agencies did not fit the definitions of accountability; that is, their findings were such that the Forest Service was in disagreement with the findings, or they covered other areas such as cost efficiency or lack of direction.

The conclusions drawn from these audits parallel those found in our internal review of the current situation. The auditing agencies look at our work through the various programs and functions. They rarely provide any examination of how these functions interrelate or work within a broader context of other resource areas related to the audited function or program. Their findings do, however, indicate that while our own internal review process found most of the same problems they identified, only an external review prompts corrective action. When their findings do address the lack of adequate direction, the need for integration and coordination of all areas also is recommended. We are cited for a lack of clear direction to our employees for them to meet internal and external requirements and expectations. Inadequate direction and unclear expectations, caused individuals to feel less accountable for their work.

In most instances the Forest Service used the severity of the audits and the public attention that accompanies them to make changes, set priorities, and hold policy discussions. This is particularly noteworthy since both OIG and GAO reported that in almost all instances, the Forest Service had already identified the problems and situations prior to any external audit. Hence, taking action to improve results is an area of great potential improvement.

Appendix B—The Do's and Don'ts of Accountability

The Do's and Don'ts of Establishing Agreements

Participation

Do get those who must accomplish the work agreements involved in the development of the work agreements. Try to reach agreement on work agreements, and at least help determine whether the expectation is feasible or not.

Don't develop work agreements on major programs unilaterally.

Why? You never know what an agreement looks like through the eyes of receivers unless you get them involved and ask them.

Integration

Do carefully check whether functional directions are consistent with, and can be integrated with, work agreements from other functional programs.

Don't develop function work agreements in a vacuum.

Why? We can't afford the functionalism we used to have if we are to reach internally consistent work agreements and if we are to keep the number of work agreements at a reasonable level.

Line involvement

Do have good staff analysis and advice for line officers to use in establishing work agreements.

Don't establish work agreements unilaterally from staff offices.

Why? Work agreements should be integrated across staff functions by line officers, and line officers are responsible for holding others accountable for their performance.

New work agreements

Do consider any new work agreements that are established in light of all previous ones.

Don't simply establish new work agreements as if they can be treated in isolation and alone.

Why? Everyone already has a full plate of work agreements, so new ones must be accompanied by new resources or capabilities or already existing work agreements must be removed or lowered in priority.

Appeal processes

Do develop simple and efficient ways to modify or appeal work agreements at the same time they are established. If the agreements truly are not open to appeal, say so clearly but limit nonappealable status to the highest priority agreements.

Don't issue work agreements without some way to provide for earlyreview.

Why? Asking the possible is tough enough, so there must be some way to overcome the truly infeasible agreements or bring major differences of perspective to light early.

Appeal processes

Do use the means available to appeal for modification of work agreements if they cannot be achieved or if there is serious question about the wisdom of moving forward to achieve the agreements.

Don't simply ignore the work agreements if you think they should not or cannot be achieved.

Why? The person in authority who established the work agreements has every right to assume the agreements are achievable and should work to implement them if not told otherwise.

Priorities

Do develop priorities for all work agreements and only establish them for top-priority results and processes. For example, if initiatives are optional and not mandatory, say so.

Don't establish work agreements on anything but the most important items.

Why? Even if you restrict agreements to the most important items, there is still likely more work than the competent manager can easily handle, and even then priorities are needed to focus efforts and limited resources.

Acceptable bounds

Do provide clear information on the tolerable bounds for acceptable performance on work agreements.

Don't establish all work agreements with unrealistically or unnecessarily tight performance tolerance.

Why? Resources and people's energy are too scarce to spend them accomplishing something to a higher standard than is necessary.

Skills

Do provide special training needed if work agreements are beyond current abilities of the work force or reassign the people with the skills needed to get the job done.

Don't simply establish work agreements and assume that people will somehow figure out how to do them.

Why? Even the best-trained and committed workers need to keep their skills up-to-date.

Resources

Do ensure that the unit or person receiving a work agreement has the resources to achieve the objectives.

Don't establish work agreements unless there are corresponding resources for a competent work force to achieve them.

Why? The objectives must be achievable with the resources available or resources that can be reasonably gained.

Responsibility

Do accept the responsibility to implement work agreements carefully that have been established by higher levels of line authority.

Don't ignore work agreements that are issued as if they were discretionary unless they are clearly labeled as such.

Why? Large and diverse organizations simply can't function effectively if everybody makes independent decisions about what they will and will not do.

Legal compliance

Do implement work agreements that have been established through the democratic processes governing public institutions through laws, regulations, and court decisions.

Don't think that the Forest Service has total control over all the work that the agency is held accountable for.

Why? Many issues of public value and public policy are reserved for the democratic institutions of the Congress, the Executive Branch, and the courts; and they are not the prerogative of professional career decision makers.

Results orientation

Do focus work agreements as much as possible on the results of management, rather than on the processes that must be used to achieve the results unless there is a clear legal requirement for the processes.

Don't establish work agreements on "how" to do a job unless the processes are dictated by someone else or unless it has been proven that other processes likely to be used will not achieve the agreement.

Why? The person responsible for achieving the work agreement needs as broad a range of process options available as possible.

The Do's and Don'ts of Checking Progress

Recognition of need

Do develop checking processes appropriate to the work agreements.

Don't think that checking is not necessary to evaluate progress or that somehow everyone will perform as expected if they are just left alone and valued.

Why? Checking is one of the best ways to share perspectives and deal with the differences of opinion about priorities.

Checking

Do develop checking mechanisms when the work agreements are established and identify them for everyone involved.

Don't develop agreements, assume that they will be followed, and then not verify performance.

Why? If the work agreements are not important enough to follow up on, they are not important enough to issue in the first place.

Risk assessment

Do develop checking processes commensurate with the importance of the work agreements.

Don't overkill on checking for low-risk activities and neglect very important activities.

Why? Checking itself is a strong reinforcement of the relative importance of the agreement.

Involvement

Do get the people who established the expectations and those who must carry out the expectations involved in the oversight.
Don't do all oversight as top-down reviews unless there is clear concern that a conflict of interest would occur if the oversight were accomplished at a lower level.
Why? Oversight is one of the best ways to share different perspectives on the desirability of the expectations and the realities of performing them.

Positive attitude about checking

Do consider and design checking to be a positive part of the work process.
Don't consider it an indicator of lack of trust.
Why? Especially as public values about natural resources continue to evolve, and Forest Service programs with them, we will need all the techniques available to make successful transitions.

Oversight skills

Do train people in the most efficient and effect checking methods.
Don't simply assume that everybody knows how to check progress well.
Why? Accomplishing checking in a manner that appropriately involves people and focuses on the most important issues is a learned skill just like any other job skill.

The Do's and Don'ts of Making Adjustments

Adjustments

Do establish adjustments and make them known when the expectations are established.
Don't think that important expectations will be automatically achieved without focused adjustments.
Why? Adjustments are the most important way to demonstrate the importance and priority of work agreements, and everyone deserves to know the rules they will be measured against.

Apply adjustments

Do consistently and fairly apply adjustments that are announced as appropriate to the work agreement.
Don't announce adjustments that will be applied, but then not apply them.
Why? There is no quicker way to invalidate the expectations and the authority of the one who established the work agreements than to fail to apply appropriate adjustments.

Tailor to individuals

Do consider individual's desires when rewards are given, but remember to be fair and equitable with everyone.
Don't simply apply the same reward to everybody.
Why? The objective of rewards is to reward the individual, and different people view the same reward differently.

Think broadly

Do develop an intentionally broad set of adjustments, considering revisions of work agreements just as much as rewards and punishments.

Don't think that all adjustments should be tailored as rewards or punishments.
Why? Until and unless progress checking determines that the outcome was the result of the capability or commitment of the performer, the outcome could just as easily call for adjustments of resources available or the work agreements themselves.

Mutual understanding

Do insure that there is mutual understanding of why the adjustments are being implemented.
Don't assume that the receiver of the adjustments will know the reasons.
Why? Learning and continuous improvement are the objectives and only come with clear communication of rationale.

Timely consequences

Do provide feedback and consequences as soon as a progress check has been made.
Don't wait until the end of the year or the end of the performance period.
Why? The objective of productive management of work agreements is to improve the performance on work agreements and that requires that adjustments be made as soon as practical.

Reasonable time

Do give the one responsible for achieving work agreements a reasonable time to perform.
Don't implement adjustments too early.
Why? Everyone learns while working and everyone deserves an opportunity to demonstrate whether they are capable of performing what is expected of them.

Performance standards

Do include the most vital work agreements in personal performance standards and act on them in performance ratings.
Don't plan to address all of the accountability for accomplishment of all work agreements in performance standards.
Why? Each person is responsible for many work agreements and only the very highest priority ones will materially affect the overall performance rating. The impact of moderate and low-priority work agreements will be lost.